

New Models for Transition Planning in Massachusetts

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Executive Summary

While the transition from childhood to adulthood is difficult for many adolescents, it can be especially challenging for youth who are aging out of foster care. At an age when most young people continue to depend on family for financial and social support, those aging out of care (and even those leaving care before they technically “age out”) are losing the support provided through the Department of Children and Families (DCF). This presents enormous challenges and makes thoughtful, effective planning for transition absolutely critical. Fortunately for the Commonwealth’s foster youth, Massachusetts passed legislation in 2010 which requires that all youth be given the option of receiving voluntary services from DCF until they are 21 and makes mandatory the development of a written transition plan.

The Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) believes this new transition planning requirement presents an opportunity to consider whether other states or counties are using models for transition planning that might have relevance for Massachusetts. The *New Models for Transition Planning in Massachusetts* project was designed to identify models that are aligned with the policies and practices recommended in the literature and to see if there is interest among stakeholders in bringing one or more of the most promising models to Massachusetts.

The term “transition planning” is used broadly in the literature and in practice to refer to the services, activities and programs aimed at preparing older foster youth to live healthy and productive lives after leaving care. For the purposes of this project, we use the term “transition planning” specifically to refer to the process of developing a written plan now required for all foster youth. We believe that a written plan, agreed to by a youth and monitored by the adults supporting that youth’s transition, can help ensure that all aspects of transition planning, from permanency planning to life skills training and education, are being addressed.

The *New Models for Transition Planning in Massachusetts* project included a review of the literature and the legislative history of transition planning, interviews with experts across the country to identify and understand promising models, and interviews with Massachusetts stakeholders. The seven models described in this report share a common strategy of bringing agency and non-agency adults together with youth in one or more meetings to plan for their future. For the purposes of the report, we are calling this a *collaborative, conference-based approach* to transition planning. The different approaches to this basic model, which are described in the report, are based on the belief that effective planning involves engaging a circle of supporters for youth and incorporating many, if not most, of the principles recommended in the literature. Interviews with stakeholders in Massachusetts revealed significant interest in the issue of transition planning and an eagerness to share their observations about transition planning in the Commonwealth.

Findings from Stakeholder Interviews

- Understanding the new law
 - Most stakeholders had a limited understanding of the state’s 90-day transition planning requirement.
 - There is little consistency in how judges interpret their responsibility to approve transition plans.

- DCF transition planning process
 - Little or no change has been observed in DCF's transition planning practices since passage of the new law in 2010.
 - There is a uniform lack of clarity around DCF's transition planning process.
 - Significant variation is observed in DCF's practice of working with transition age youth, including the process for signing and rescinding agreements for voluntary services.
 - There are too few caseworkers with expertise in working with transition age youth.
 - There are systemic barriers to serving youth effectively, most notably a lack of affordable housing.
- Developing effective transition plans
 - It is especially important that the process be youth-driven, involve clear accountability for follow-up and include an assessment of a youth's readiness for transition.
 - Collaborative, conference-based transition planning involving youth and adults has a number of advantages but could be a challenging format for some youth.
 - Planning needs to start early and involve multiple meetings.
 - Youth are more likely to participate if they have an independent advocate in the process.
 - Good facilitation is critical, with some advantages seen to having someone outside DCF act as facilitator.

While the project did not result in a clear sense of the superiority of one model or program over another, it did reveal that a number of states and counties are taking a collaborative, conference-based approach to developing written transition plans. The recommendations below are based on the literature, interviews with those implementing the seven models and interviews with stakeholders.

Recommendations

1. The DCF transition planning process should be transparent, especially to foster parents, attorneys and those providing direct services to transition age youth.
2. While the transition planning process needs to be individualized for each youth, there should be a core set of elements which ensure that all youth have access to high quality transition planning.
3. There should be clear accountability for tracking and monitoring of the action items identified in transition plans.
4. Caseworkers involved in transition planning should receive specialized training in working with adolescents.
5. DCF should find ways for alumni to serve as resources to youth in the planning process.

6. Judges, attorneys, guardians *ad litem* and court appointed special advocates should be given training around what constitutes a good transition plan and the steps they can take to support effective transition planning.
7. Judges should be provided with a checklist of questions to ask youth in order to ascertain whether they were truly engaged in the planning process and understand the plan that has been presented to the court.
8. Judges should be provided with sample transition plans, which set a high standard for the level of thoroughness and detail the court should expect to see in plans submitted by DCF.
9. Processes and partnerships should be developed that support better collaboration and coordination among DCF, the courts and youths' attorneys around transition planning.

I Introduction

In 2008, the federal government passed the Fostering Connections to Success Act and Increasing Adoptions Act (“Fostering Connections”), which was intended to promote permanency, to improve outcomes for foster youth and to increase support for older youth. In recognition of the research showing that few youth are prepared to live independently at age 18, the legislation offered states the option of seeking reimbursement for youth to remain in care until 21. The legislation also required that transition plans be developed for all youth exiting care. In 2010, Massachusetts aligned its legislation with Fostering Connections in order to receive federal reimbursement for older youth.

The Office of the Child Advocate believes that the state’s new transition planning requirement presents an opportunity to consider whether there are models for transition planning being used in other states that have relevance for Massachusetts. The *New Models for Transition Planning in Massachusetts* project was designed to identify models that are aligned with principles and practices recommended in the literature and to see if there is stakeholder interest in bringing one or more of the most promising models to Massachusetts.

The project involved:

- A review of transition planning legislation
- A review of the literature on transition planning
- Interviews with 25 experts in the field aimed at identifying promising models
- Interviews with administrators for seven promising models
- Interviews with 45 Massachusetts stakeholders, including leadership and staff from agencies that work with transition age youth, attorneys, judges, leaders of CASA organizations and foster alumni

This report sets the stage for considering new models for transition planning in Massachusetts with a brief legislative history of transition planning (Section III) and an overview of the literature on transition planning (Section V). It then provides an overview of transition planning in Massachusetts (Section VI) before describing the models used in seven other states for developing written transition plans (Section VII). This is followed by a summary of findings from interviews with Massachusetts’ stakeholders about these models, as well as their views on transition planning in Massachusetts. The report concludes with a set of recommendations for improving transition planning in Massachusetts (Section VIII).

II Background

While the transition from childhood to adulthood is difficult for many adolescents, it can be especially challenging for youth aging out of foster care. When the foster care system fails to achieve permanent families for youth removed from their homes, they often enter adulthood with a legacy of multiple traumas and disruptions— abuse or neglect in their families of origin, removal from their homes, multiple placements in care, and significant disruptions.¹ Although an increasing number of states allow youth to remain in care until they reach 21, or even older, this is significantly below the average age at which most youth in America no longer rely on their parents for financial and social support. Most young adults today are still finishing their education, living at home with their parents and financially dependent on their families into their mid to late 20s.² When foster youth age out and lose the support of the system, many have limited, if any, financial or familial

resources on which to draw. Not surprisingly, national statistics show that former foster youth are disproportionately challenged to achieve educational milestones, find employment and secure stable housing.³ Similar outcomes have been found for former foster youth in Massachusetts.

Over the past three decades, significant efforts have been made to improve the outcomes of former foster youth. These include an increased focus on permanency, an emphasis on life skills training, job experience, volunteer opportunities and an effort to connect more foster youth with mentors. Despite these efforts, much work remains to be done to prepare foster youth for the adult responsibilities they will face.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (“Fostering Connections”), passed in 2008, was designed to promote permanency and to improve outcomes for foster youth through a number of policy changes including increased support for older youth.⁴ Fostering Connections requires that foster youth be provided with support to develop a transition plan “during the 90-day period prior to the date on which the child will attain 18 years of age, or such greater age as the State may elect under paragraph (8)(B)(iii), whether during that period foster care maintenance payments are being made on the child’s behalf or the child is receiving benefits or services under [Chafee § 677]”.⁵ Paragraph (8)(B)(iii) allows States to receive reimbursement for providing child welfare services to youth through age 21 provided the youth is involved in one or more approved activities such as work, school, or job training.⁶ States are also able to extend care beyond age 18 to youth who have adoption assistance agreements or kinship guardianship assistance agreements if those agreements became effective after the youth turned 16 years old.⁷ If a State chooses to offer extended care to any of these youth, the youth must also receive transition planning support 90 days before exiting extended care.⁸

Under Fostering Connections, the transition plan must be personalized at the direction of the youth and be as detailed as the youth chooses to make it⁹ but must “include specific options on housing, health insurance, education, local opportunities for mentors and continuing support services, and work force supports and employment services.”¹⁰

While Massachusetts was already using state funds to support some youth to remain in care after age 18, the state aligned its legislation with Fostering Connections in 2010 in order to receive federal reimbursement for that care.¹¹ Mass. Gen. Law 119 § 23(f) (effective January 3, 2011) requires caseworkers to support and assist youth in “developing a transition plan which fulfills the requirements of [the Fostering Connections Act].”¹² Mass. Gen. Law 119 § 29B(c) further requires that the permanency plans of youth 16 and older must address the services needed to assist him or her in transitioning¹³ and the transition plan required under Fostering Connections and M.G.L. 119 § 23(f) must be incorporated into the permanency plan when the youth is 17 years and 9 months of age.¹⁴ Additionally, Massachusetts law now requires the court to retain jurisdiction until it finds a “satisfactory transition plan has been provided.”¹⁵

III Legislative History of Transition Planning for Foster Youth

In 1985, federal funding was provided for the first time to fund transition planning services for youth age 16 and older. Through amendments in 1988 and 1994, funding was made permanent and expanded to include all foster youth age 16 and older.¹⁶ The first federal requirement to plan for a youth’s transition from foster care, which was issued in the 1987 Program Instruction ACYF-PI-87-01, stated that case plans for youth 16 and older had to “include a written description of the programs

and services which will help the [youth] prepare for transition from foster care to independent living.”¹⁷ In 1997, the Adoption and Safe Families Act further required that a greater emphasis be placed on permanency in transition planning¹⁸ by incorporating “the identification of supportive relationships, the creation of written agreements like the Permanency Pact, and the involvement of caring, supportive adults in the planning process.”¹⁹

In 1999, the Foster Care Independence Act created the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (Chafee). This law amended Title IV-E and provided federal funding to expand youth transitioning services to youth who exited care at 18 but were not yet 21.²⁰ To date, a total of \$140 million a year has been allocated under Chafee to states for independent living services. Under Chafee, the case plans of foster care youth “where appropriate, for a child age 16 or over, [include] a written description of programs and services” that will help them transition.²¹ Chafee also requires that the Administration of Children and Families evaluate independent living services across the country.²² In response, the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) was established on February 26, 2008. States are required to collect information on each youth receiving independent living services funded by Chafee and to collect demographic and outcome information on certain youth over time.²³

Transition planning requirements were expanded further by the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 as discussed earlier in this report.²⁴ For states to seek reimbursement for youth in care past their 18th birthday, the youth must either be: “completing secondary education or equivalent; enrolled in an institution providing post-secondary or vocational education; participating in a program or activity designed to promote or remove barriers to employment; employed at least 80 hours per month”; or be incapable of meeting any of those criteria because of a medical condition.²⁵

IV What is Transitioning Planning?

The term “transition planning” is used broadly in the literature and in practice to refer to the services, activities and programs aimed at preparing older foster youth to live healthy and productive lives after leaving foster care. ***For the purposes of the New Models for Transition Planning project, we use the term “transition planning” specifically to refer to the process of developing a written transition plan, as now required for all foster youth before they leave care on or after their 18th birthday.*** The Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) believes that a written plan, agreed to by a youth and monitored by the adults supporting that youth’s transition, can help ensure that all aspects of transition planning, from permanency planning to life skills training and education, are being addressed. The OCA recognizes the paramount importance of achieving permanency for all children but also believes that the state has an obligation to ensure that all youth are prepared for adulthood, with or without permanent legal families.

V Recommended Principles and Practices for Transition Planning

While there are numerous studies on poor educational, employment and other life outcomes for former foster youth,²⁶ the research on transition planning for foster youth is limited. There is, however, significant research on youth transitioning in the context of special education, mental health and juvenile justice.²⁷ The principles and practices recommended for use with foster youth draw from this research as well as other transition-related literature.²⁸ In order to understand how

these might apply to the development of a written transition plan, we have organized them into three categories:

1. Guiding principles for transition plan development
2. Essential elements of a transition plan
3. Recommended practices for transition planning

Guiding Principles for Transition Plan Development

The literature tells us that good transition planning is youth-driven, tailored to the needs of the individual youth, firmly grounded in a youth's strengths and appropriate for his or her stage of development.

Additionally, it emphasizes that the process itself should help youth build their competence and self-esteem, as well as address the emotional trauma they may have experienced. Further, it recommends that the transition planning process incorporate families of origin when appropriate. While the principles can be applied to all aspects of transition planning, they are also relevant to the process of developing a written transition plan.

Youth-driven. Engaging youths in the transition planning process is widely considered a best practice.²⁹ Incorporating youth into the process has been an essential thrust in the legislation since the passage of Chafee in 1999 required that youth “participate directly in designing their own program activities that prepare them for independent living.”³⁰ To date, however, the practice has not been consistently and meaningfully incorporated into most transition planning with foster youth.³¹

The literature supports engaging youth as much as possible in all aspects of transition planning. This does not mean simply having youth attend planning meetings but enabling and encouraging their active participation in the planning process.³² Youth should be considered partners in the process³³ and should be encouraged to lead meetings³⁴. This approach recognizes not only that youth are experts in their own lives but are ultimately responsible for carrying out their plans.³⁵ Research has shown that youth who have meaningfully engaged in the process are more likely to comply with the plan.³⁶ This could be because it increases their sense of fairness,³⁷ encourages them to assert ownership over their own future, or simply empowers them to believe that achieving their goals is possible.

To make youth's participation in transition planning meaningful, there must be training and support to prepare them to take active leadership roles in the process.³⁸ One study found that youth's personal style, the size of the meeting and the level of abstraction of topics discussed all affected how much the youth participated.³⁹ It is important that those supporting the youth in this endeavor recognize how these issues can influence a youth's comfort and confidence. Also, most foster youth are used to having important decisions made for them, so taking a leadership role may feel especially disconcerting. Former foster youth in Massachusetts reported that before leaving care they did not realize they would soon have to make all their own decisions and were, therefore, not as engaged in transition planning as they should have been.⁴⁰

Individually tailored. The transition planning process needs to be tailored to the individual youth and to incorporate the youth's unique strengths, needs, goals and dreams.⁴¹ A person-centered

planning approach has been suggested as a way to provide individually-tailored transition planning.⁴² Person-centered planning typically involves: “creating a circle of formal and informal supports; focusing on talents, strengths, and interests of the young person; identifying the young person’s aspirations and developing a long-term plan for realizing them; establishing roles and commitments of team members; and empowering the young person to work toward his or her goals.”⁴³

Strengths-based. The process of creating a transition plan should build on a youth’s strengths,⁴⁴ “focusing on what is right and functional with a youth.”⁴⁵ The literature suggests that youth’s “interests, talents, goals, and aspirations” should be continuously discussed and the youth should be supported in clarifying these if they are unclear.⁴⁶

Age and developmentally appropriate. The literature emphasizes the critical importance of providing developmentally appropriate transition planning.⁴⁷ Recent research on brain development has provided a biological basis for the challenges adolescents can face in “controlling impulses, maintaining successful social relationships, engaging in long-term planning and controlling emotional responses.”⁴⁸ These characteristics can make transition planning all the more difficult and underscore the importance of preparing youth to be active and effective participants in the planning process. The transition planning process should also account for developmental delays that may have occurred in childhood due to the trauma history many foster care youth experience.⁴⁹

Transition planning needs to recognize that transition age youth are no longer children but are not yet adults. Youth need to be connected to caring adults⁵⁰ and to be encouraged to believe they can succeed.⁵¹ The process should allow youth to practice skills, make mistakes, and learn from those mistakes.⁵² Goals should be measurable and appropriately modified as the youth ages.⁵³

Develops self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and problem-solving skills. Consistent with a developmentally-appropriate model, the transition planning process should provide youth with opportunities to build self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy and problem solving skills.⁵⁴

Addresses experiences that have led to a loss of identity or distrust of permanent connections. Transition plans must address the emotional ramifications of the disruptions in family life youth have experienced, as well as their experiences in foster care. The transition planning process should incorporate a trauma-informed approach, acknowledge the impact of loss and the accompanying grief and “create opportunities for [youth] to make sense of their life histories and current experiences.”⁵⁵ This will promote healing and emotional security.⁵⁶ One author suggested using Walter Bridges’ Transitions Framework⁵⁷ to help both adults and youth understand the emotional and psychological effects of the transition process itself.⁵⁸

Incorporates families of origin when appropriate. Research shows that many former foster care youth return to their birth families after exiting care.⁵⁹ This is a reality the transition planning process needs to acknowledge.⁶⁰ Some models being used for transition planning allow youth to invite birth family members to participate in the process.⁶¹ Youth may need preparation and assistance, however, in reconnecting in a safe and supportive way.⁶² They “need help in dealing with their family histories . . . and to deal with the issues that may still remain.”⁶³

Essential Elements of a Transition Plan

The literature recommends that a transition plan include a focus on promoting permanent, lifelong relationships between the youth and caring adults. Furthermore, the literature tells us that the areas of youth housing, education, employment and health care need to be addressed for youth to transition successfully.

Emphasis on finding and promoting permanent connections. There is little disagreement that permanent, lifelong relationships are essential for the health of youth whose relationships with their families of origin have been severed.⁶⁴ Some would argue that these must be permanent legal relationships and that achieving anything less than adoption for all children is to fail them. Others would say that permanency can include relationships short of adoption so long as they provide youth with a sense of security and support. Some recommend that youth be able to define for themselves what permanency means and to determine which relationships they value.⁶⁵ The National Child Welfare Resource Center provides suggestions around how to engage youth in permanency planning.⁶⁶ Whatever definition of permanency one uses, the literature stresses that it must be addressed as part of a transition planning process.⁶⁷ Permanent relationships with caring adults can provide support to youth in every aspect of their transition process and into adulthood⁶⁸ and are thought to be “the most important key to ensuring a successful transition.”⁶⁹ Promoting permanency involves assisting youth in finding caring adults and helping to strengthen these relationships.⁷⁰ “For youth at the brink of aging out, any transition plan without a concurrent permanency plan is inadequate and shortsighted.”⁷¹

Addresses housing, education, employment, and health care. While there is little discussion in the literature about which issues a written transition plan should address, most of the literature on transition planning speaks to the critical issues of housing, education, health care and employment, that youth will face as they transition out of care.⁷² This is reflected in *Fostering Connections*, which requires each of these issues be addressed in the transition plan.⁷³

Housing. Securing housing is “critical to the ability of former foster youth to hold a steady job, continue their education, or care for their children.”⁷⁴ Many former foster youth have trouble securing stable housing.⁷⁵ Transition planning should include discussions about what youth think they need, what they can afford and what housing options and programs are available.⁷⁶ Youth should plan for and establish goals for living independently but also have secondary options such as family, friends, and homeless shelters incorporated into the plan as well.⁷⁷ Plans for safe and stable housing must be in place before youth can be discharged from care.⁷⁸

Education. The literature recommends that setting educational goals be a part of transition planning.⁷⁹ Transition planning should involve informing youth about different educational opportunities and the value of postsecondary education.⁸⁰ To support and encourage youth who wish to pursue higher education, transition planning should involve determining the youth’s educational goals and exploring how those can be achieved.⁸¹ This should be individually tailored to the youth according to the youth’s strengths and goals.⁸²

Employment Plans. Transition planning needs to address employment goals and options.⁸³ The ability to acquire stable employment affects quality of life, access to housing, health care and is essential to achieving self-sufficiency.⁸⁴ The research recommends transition planning include both short- and long-term employment goals that recognize what youth can achieve after leaving care, as

well as what they can work toward in the future.⁸⁵ Additionally, transition planning should include informing youth about different employment options and services available to support finding employment.⁸⁶

Health Care. Addressing health care options and needs is an important part of transition planning,⁸⁷ especially because former foster care youth disproportionately experience physical and mental health problems.⁸⁸ Because health care services are handled by caseworkers while youth are in care,⁸⁹ youth who age out of the system rarely have the experience, knowledge or support to navigate the health care system.⁹⁰ Transition planning should include providing youth with information about their health care service options, as well as a plan for how the youth will access health care after leaving care.⁹¹ Before youth leave care, the literature also recommends that they have medical screenings⁹² and be given information about their medical histories.⁹³

Recommended Management Practices for the Transition Plan Process

Begin transition planning early. The law requires that youth receive assistance in transition planning within the 90-day period before they leave care. However, most experts interviewed for this project recommended that the process begin earlier, even as early as between the ages of 14 and 16.⁹⁴

Process facilitated by skilled professionals. The success of transition planning greatly depends on the competence of the people assisting youth in the process. The literature recommends using trained facilitators who are familiar with adolescent behavior and brain development and able to communicate effectively with transition age youth.⁹⁵

Accountability for the plan. The literature recommends there be clear accountability assigned for action items in the plan. There should also be a process in place where someone follows up with the youth to determine the plan's effectiveness and whether modifications need to be made.⁹⁶ Many persons also recommend there be judicial oversight to further ensure the transition planning process is being carried out.⁹⁷

Systemic support. Many foster youth are involved with multiple systems, e.g. mental health, school, or juvenile justice. Coordination and cooperation among the agencies is critical to crafting to an effective transition plan.⁹⁸ The literature recommends increasing cross-system sharing of information and strengthening collaboration⁹⁹ especially between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.¹⁰⁰

VI Transition Planning in Massachusetts

In July 2013, DCF issued a revised new permanency planning policy (the "Policy")¹⁰¹ (Appendix 1), which was developed via a multi-year process of negotiation between DCF and the SEIU local 509, the Massachusetts Union for Human Service Workers. The Policy describes two transition plans: a transition plan for sustained connection and a transition plan for discharge and case closing. The Policy lays out the minimum requirements for each. Other than to say that the process will involve youth working with their social workers, the Policy does not address the process to be used in developing the plan, any coordination that might be needed with other agencies, whether other adults important to the youth might be involved, or even what a model plan would look like.

Transition planning for sustained connection

The youth, the DCF social worker and the youth's adolescent outreach worker (when assigned) work together to develop a plan for the youth's transition to sustained connection with DCF. The plan is to be individualized in accordance with a shared understanding of the youth's life skills. The Policy states that DCF's Youth Readiness Assessment Tool (the "Tool"), which is required for every youth in foster care, will provide the outline for this transition plan.¹⁰² (Appendix 2) The Tool identifies tasks or activities necessary to address goals that have been established for the youth and identifies the person responsible for working with the youth to achieve the goal. It is used during a youth's time in care to evaluate the youth's life skills and strengths and is completed over time by the community-connected residential treatment center, the contracted foster care provider, or in some cases, an adolescent outreach worker. Foster parents may also complete or update sections of the Tool. The Tool is intended to inform the Service Plan and is reviewed jointly every six months by the youth and one of the above-identified parties.

Work is to begin on a draft transition plan at age 17. In addition to planning for sustained connection, the plan also must address how the youth will meet DCF requirements for continued services and must include specific options regarding education, employment or work skills development, housing, health insurance including a medical health care proxy, local opportunities for mentoring and other specific support services.¹⁰³ The draft transition plan is reviewed at the first Foster Care Review after a youth turns 17 and then at the Foster Care Review that is scheduled between ages 17.5 and 18. At the second review, the youth, with the assistance of the youth's social worker or adolescent outreach worker and other individuals chosen by the youth, presents the transition plan and a request for sustained connection/voluntary services.

Transition planning for discharge and case closing

The Policy states that planning for discharge and case closing must begin no later than 90 calendar days prior to discharge and case closing.

[DCF] provide a transition planning process in collaboration with the youth/young adult, based on an assessment of her/his readiness for living interdependently in the community, age and follow-up supports. The discharge and transition planning process must include a discussion of the youth/young adult's education, employment or work skills development, housing, health insurance including the importance of a medical health care proxy, local opportunities for mentoring and other specific support services. The plan should be reflected in the Service Plan and/or dictation and must be reported in any Permanency Hearing Report filed with a court after the youth/young adult turns age 17 years and 9 months old. Any outstanding life skills needs are prioritized and addressed prior to discharge from placement and case closing.¹⁰⁴

The Policy also states that during the 90-day period, DCF must "collaborate with the youth to plan specific tasks/activities necessary to address identified needs and to achieve targeted goals and to identify the person responsible to assist in the process. It further states that the discharge and transition plan should include a description of the resources that will be available to the youth/young adult prior to case closing..."¹⁰⁵ and provides a list of those resources. While the Policy

speaks to what must be included in the different transition plans and when each must be developed, it contains no information on the planning *process* itself, e.g. what the structure would be, how the participants would actually collaborate with the youth and their supporters, etc.

VII Models for Developing Written Transition Plans

Given the relatively new requirement for written transition plans, the goal of this project was to identify models for transition plan development that are aligned with recommended principles and practices, and to engage stakeholders to see if there is interest in bringing one or more of the most promising models to Massachusetts. In the first phase of the process we spoke with 25 experts and practitioners across the country and asked them to identify promising models. From these interviews and the literature review, we identified 15-20 programs, which might be of interest. We then had interviews with persons involved with the seven that appeared best aligned with the recommended principles and practices. The programs are listed below.

1. E Makua Ana Youth Circle – Hawaii
2. GOALS (Growth Opportunities Achieve Life Long Success) -- San Francisco County
3. Youth Transition Conferences -- Hennepin County, Minnesota
4. Youth Life Conferencing – South Florida Counseling Center (Miami and Dade Counties, Florida)
5. Circles of Support – Texas
6. Transition Roundtables – Georgia
7. Preparing Youth for Adulthood – Washington DC

It quickly became clear that the seven programs, none of which has been formally evaluated, shared a common strategy of bringing agency and non-agency adults together with youth to plan for their future. Each was also based on the belief that effective planning involves engaging a circle of adult supporters for a youth. While the programs share a common core of being structured around a transition planning conference(s), they vary along a number of critical dimensions, including:

- Responsibility – In some cases, the transition planning process was managed by the child welfare agency. In others, it was contracted out to a non-profit organization or involved collaboration among multiple entities.
- Youth participation and leadership – Youth participation was optional in some programs, required in others. The extent of preparation for the youth to take a leadership role varied from modest to significant.
- Frequency – Some transition planning conferences were one-time events. Others were scheduled as needed or occurred at regularly scheduled intervals.
- Permanence – All of the conferences sought to identify and include adults who might serve as permanent, lifelong connections for the youth. Only one was significantly focused on achieving a permanent legal relationship for youth before they left care.
- Tracking progress – The systems for accountability and tracking of progress varied widely from having one person with clear responsibility for follow-up, to a computer-based system for tracking progress, to a more diffuse system for accountability with progress tracked primarily through follow-up conferences.

The models are summarized briefly below. More detailed descriptions are found in the Appendices. The descriptions of the programs were current as of winter 2012/spring 2013.

E Makua Ana Youth Circle – Hawaii

The E Makua Ana Youth Circle is a transition planning conference conducted by a non-profit organization under contract with the state. Participation is optional beginning at age 16. Prior to the Youth Circle, facilitators, who are trained in youth engagement and facilitation, meet with the youth to learn about their goals and circumstances. During the circles, which have a clearly prescribed structure that focuses on youth leadership, the group identifies the youth's strengths and options. The youth is given private time to create a plan, which the youth then presents to the group. The time interval for follow-up circles is flexible. Facilitators keep in contact with the youth to make sure tasks are being completed. The goal is to have three circles before a youth exits care. Circles can be held up to age 22. (Appendix 3)

Growth Opportunities Achieve Life Long Success (GOALS) -- San Francisco County, California

GOALS conferences are designed to assist youth in identifying adults who can help them successfully transition to independence. The conferences are required for all foster youth beginning at age 16 and reoccur every six months. The youth has complete control over who attends the meeting and helps to set the agenda, which must include permanency (with a goal of five permanent connections before leaving care) and may also include housing, income, legal documents, mental health and health insurance. Meetings are moderated by trained facilitators from the Family and Children's Services' Team Decision-Making Unit. Case workers have primary responsibility for follow-up and can call on meeting participants for assistance in helping youth to accomplish their goals. (Appendix 4)

Youth Transition Conferences – Hennepin County, Minnesota

The goal of Youth Transition Conferences, which are run by the Hennepin County Child Protection Services, is to build a circle of support for a youth and to develop a blueprint and resources for independence prior to leaving care. Youth are encouraged, but not required, to participate. Generally, youth have between three and five – but as many as 10 - conferences before they age out. They receive only minimal preparation to participate in the conferences as the opportunity to re-conference is seen as a way to build their decision-making capacity over time. Other than the caseworker, who is required to attend, the youth determines the list of invitees. The meetings include a discussion of the youth's strengths, a focus on the life domains relevant to the youth at the time of the conference and development/review of a plan. There is no formal follow-up process between conferences other than the normal contact between the youths and their caseworkers. (Appendix 5)

Youth Life Conferencing – South Florida Family Counseling Center, Miami, Florida

The Youth Life Conferencing (YLC) model was developed by the South Florida Family Counseling Center when it was under contract to provide transition planning services to youth aging out of care in Miami and Dade counties. The YLC model, which was discontinued after a year for cost reasons, consisted of: a one-time transition planning conference; weekly follow-up and monitoring of progress; and a monthly curriculum-based peer support group meeting for 24 months (12 months each pre- and post-emancipation). Each youth determined who was invited to their conference, with the exception of the

youth's case manager, who was not optional. Conferences were moderated by facilitators trained in youth engagement and the Bridges to Transition Framework. During the conference the youth's status on eight domains was assigned a current and projected score of 1-5. This became the starting point for tracking each youth's progress over the next year. Each month the score was updated. (Appendix 6)

Circles of Support – Texas

The Texas Department of Family and Protection Services has used a model called Circles of Support since 2004. The circles serve as the place where transition plans are developed and where a youth's network of support is identified and strengthened. The state's goal is that each youth will have at least one circle, and ideally more, before they leave care. If a youth declines to participate, the caseworker initiates an alternative, more limited transition planning process. Youth determine who will be invited and what topics will be discussed in addition to the required domains of housing, employment/source of income, education, developmental disabilities (if relevant), health and personal needs and family/caring adults/community network. Using a standardized format, the outcome of the process is a detailed written plan with short and long-term goals. A copy of the plan is provided to everyone who attends. Primary responsibility for follow-up rests with the caseworker or Preparation for Adult Living staff. The caseworker can review a youth's transition plan at any time but must review and update it at least every six months and 90 days before the youth leaves care. (Appendix 7)

Transition Roundtables – Georgia

The Transition Roundtable (TRT) model was developed by Casey Family Programs and has been used in Georgia since 2008. Using a highly structured agenda grounded in a clearly articulated set of values and beliefs, the TRT engages a youth and a group of agency and non-agency adults in a one-time conference aimed at expediting legal permanency and developing a Transition Action Plan. While strongly focused on achieving legal permanence, the approach also recognizes that youth need to address more typical transition-related issues such as education, employment and placement, especially as these can affect achieving permanence. Preparing youth to participate in the conference is an important part of the model. Once the Transition Action Plan is developed, the caseworker or the youth's Independent Living Coordinator is responsible for completing a monthly assessment of progress. (Appendix 8)

Preparing Youth for Adulthood – Washington DC

The Preparing Youth for Adulthood program in Washington DC is a collaboration among the DC Family Court, the DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA), and Washington DC CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) program. Every three months the youth, CASA volunteer, social worker and any supporters the youth chooses come together to create and monitor a transition plan. Twice yearly, the court holds hearings to review progress in meeting the goals of the transition plan. These hearings, called "Preparation Hearings," alternate with twice yearly Permanency Hearings. The strategy is to use the influence of the court to ensure that progress is being made and to use CASA to extend the capacity of CFSA to engage young people in transition planning. At the time of the interview, the program was being carried out in the courtroom of one judge only. (See Appendix 9)

Comparison of the programs

Location	Number of Conferences	Intensity of follow up and accountability	Use of data to track progress	Intentional about developing youth problem-solving abilities	Youth preparation for conference	Focus on permanency	Address psychological issues of transition
Georgia	One	Monthly assessment. Caseworkers or independent living coordinators responsible.	Use Foster Club Readiness for Permanence scale monthly.	Not a focus	Significant.	Almost exclusive focus on permanency.	Address some internal issues (e.g. if youth is acting out/putting placement at risk). Moving towards having program address these issues more directly.
Washington DC	Every three months	Strong. Twice a month meeting between youth and CASA combined with re-conferencing and Preparation Hearings in court.	Some use of outcomes data to look at population.	Strong focus through re-conferencing.	Weak but less critical as they meet every three months.	One of a number of topics addressed.	No particular focus on psychological issues.
South Florida	One	Weekly follow up	Strong use of data. Five- point scale to track progress in every domain. Can look at data for individual or population.	Modest focus of support groups.	Modest	Report that program worked hard to engage foster and birth families.	Had monthly support groups that used Bridges to Transition curriculum.
Texas	One o two	Updates at minimum every six months. Caseworker or independent living staff lead but expect youth to take significant role.	None	Not a strong focus.	Modest	One of a number of issues addressed. Report they expend significant effort to get family and non-family members to attend. Provide special support to youth who are reconnecting with family for first time.	No particular focus on psychological issues.
Hennepin County, MN	Every six months	No formal follow-up process. Depend on re-conferencing as primary means of accountability.	None	Strong focus. Model puts youth in charge but through re-conferencing gives them the chance to make mistakes and to do things differently.	Weak	One of many topics addressed. Youth are asked to identify adults in their circles of support.	No particular focus on psychological issues.
San Francisco County, CA	Every six months	Caseworker has primary responsibility. Can call on other adults but no explicit process for making this happen other than re-conference.	None	Modest focus through re-conferencing.	Modest	Permanency is one of a number of topics addressed. Have goal of five permanent connections before leaving care.	No particular focus on psychological issues.
Hawaii	One to three	Responsibility rests with person assigned to each task. No one responsible for overall plan.	None	Not a strong focus.	Modest	One of a number of topics addressed.	No particular focus on psychological issues.

VIII Stakeholder Interviews

Between October 2012 and January 2013, interviews were conducted with individuals in five stakeholder groups. Five interviews were conducted with judges; 13 with attorneys, GALs and CASAs; 22 with leaders and staff of organizations serving transition age youth; two with alumni of the foster care system; and a single group interview with approximately 15 foster parents. The interviews were conducted in person and by phone by Elizabeth March, Fellow in the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA). Although the information derived from the interviews is informative, there are significant limitations. Most importantly, due to resource constraints, no interviews were conducted with youth and very few with alumni. The OCA had several conversations with DCF about participating in the project. Due to other priorities, DCF chose not participate. These limitations are substantial and may have resulted in a more narrow view of the issues than would have occurred had these other groups been represented.

Prior to the interview, the person to be interviewed was sent two documents – a summary of the recommended principles and practices for transition planning (Appendix 10) and a summary of the collaborative, conference-based approach to developing transition plans (Appendix 11) --and were told these would be the basis for some of the questions. The interviews were structured as conversations around five key issues and designed to elicit:

1. Their understanding of the legislative requirement for transition planning.
2. Their understanding of DCF's transition planning process and the role of the courts in approving transition plans.
3. Changes they have observed in the DCF transition planning process or in transition plans since passage of the Massachusetts legislation.
4. Principles and practices for transition planning.
5. Advantages and disadvantages of using a collaborative, conference-based approach to transition planning.

In general, we found it was more difficult for those interviewed to comment in detail on the conference-based model than on their understanding of current DCF practices. This was likely due to our having sent them only a high level summary of the conference-based model, which may have been insufficient to articulate a detailed view of its strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, the findings below focus more on stakeholder comments on current DCF practices than on their views of alternative models. While we explicitly did not ask those interviewed to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the DCF process (we asked only what they understood the process to be), there was significant interest in sharing their views on the process with the OCA.

Findings

1. There is significant interest in the issue of transition planning.

It was clear from the interviews that transition planning for foster youth is an issue of great interest to those who were interviewed. They consistently stated they were pleased to see that transition planning was an area of interest to the OCA and said they

would be willing to be part of a larger statewide conversation around transition planning should there be such an opportunity.

2. The term “transition planning” means many things people. This has significant implications for how the transition planning requirement is understood.

While for the purposes of the project, the OCA had defined transition planning as the process of developing a written plan, the interviewees were interested in sharing their opinions about what transition planning is or should be and whether or not a 90-day transition planning requirement made sense. Many saw transition planning as a continuum. “You can’t have a good plan for exiting if you haven’t done planning around living successfully on their own”. [Interview #16] “If you have not done much in the previous period around preparing them for independence and adulthood, it is unlikely that even the best plan will mean much.” [Interview #17] “If a youth has no experience with employment, how can a plan for employment make sense?” [Interview #17] One person thought that to focus on transition planning as something that happens in the 90 days before exiting care “lets DCF and others off the hook. If you have not done a good job up until 90 days prior to exit, then you have failed the youth. If we think of it this way, we never really push for a real transition plan...If we don’t hold people accountable for what comes before the 90 days, then we have failed. ” [Interview #7]

Several people expressed concern that embedding transition planning within the permanency plan, as the Massachusetts legislation does, leads to conflating the meaning of the terms “permanency planning” and “transition planning.” One executive director said,

They are not the same. Permanency planning is casework. It is preparing them for life. This is not the same as having a plan to make sure they are safe and able to support themselves post care. It is about making sure kids are making progress on the agreed-upon goals. Transition planning is not case management. It needs dedicated resources. Permanency planning is process oriented. Transition planning is transformative, taking a youth from dependence to independence. [Interview #15]

One of the attorneys interviewed believed that from a legislative perspective “transition planning” is a new term introduced by the federal government. Her sense was that while permanency planning deals with issues such as service needs, lifelong connections, etc., transition planning needs to deal with exactly what will be in place for the youth when the youth leaves care. In other words, a transition plan needs to speak to how the youth will manage without the support of the Department. She believes that DCF is interpreting the law in a way that would not require revision of a transition plan for a youth who had intended to remain in care but later decides to leave or is asked to leave. How, she asked, could a plan that envisioned a youth would remain in care be applicable to a youth who 90 days hence must manage without the resources and support of the Department? [Interview #28]

3. There is limited understanding of the 90-day transition planning requirement.

While the majority of those interviewed knew there was a new requirement for transition planning, most had a limited understanding of what the law required. Among the different understandings and misunderstandings of the requirement were:

- The transition plan has to be developed 90 days prior to a youth's 18th birthday. It might be updated as part of the permanency plan hearings but it is not something done specifically in the 90 days before a youth leaves care.
- The transition plan has to be developed 90 days before the youth leaves care at any age between 18 and 22.
- The 90-day transition planning requirement is more about setting a minimum time period for DCF to close a youth's case than it was about actually planning during that period.
- The law requires youth to come into court more regularly and to participate in a more meaningful way in developing their transition plan.
- The transition plan is a roadmap for transitioning to adulthood rather than a plan for how a youth would manage in 90 days without the support of the Department.
- The transition plan is a plan for how a youth will survive without the support of DCF.

4. There was little consistency in how judges interpreted their responsibility to approve transition plans.

The interviews revealed significant variation in how judges see their role in approving transition plans. One judge said, "Many juvenile court judges don't think it is their job to be concerned about transition planning. They are not comfortable talking with the youth. They think that this is a social work role." [Interview #3] One of the attorneys interviewed said, "Certain courts have been better than others about working on and paying attention to transition plans. Some judges are better than others at holding all the parties accountable." [Interview #30] All the judges interviewed felt that DCF provides more detailed transition plans for youth in the courts where judges are more interested in transition planning. One judge thought that if DCF's reports were richer and more detailed, judges would be more engaged in the process. [Interview #3] Two of the judges interviewed and several of the attorneys thought it would be beneficial to have more training around the new law and what they should look for in transition plans.

5. Interviewees have seen little or no change in DCF's transition planning practices since passage of the new law.

Most of those interviewed said they had seen little or no change in DCF transition planning practices since passage of the law. Those who had seen changes talked about seeing more detail and individualization in the transition plans. Some felt the law had been helpful in pushing DCF to think more about transition planning. One attorney said the process had become more formal and that the plans he saw were more likely to be organized according to the required categories. [Interview #30]

6. There is a lack of clarity around what the DCF transition planning process is.

None of those interviewed could articulate a clear or detailed picture of the DCF transition planning process. The general sense was that it was, at best, a patchwork of efforts without a clear, identifiable core. One executive director of an organization that serves foster youth said, "I don't understand DCF's transition planning process. I don't have a sense of the standards, the structure, or the process for accountability. It's hard to be involved if you don't understand the process." [Interview #21] Another executive director said, "I hear from DCF what their practices are but I hear from the kids that they don't really happen." [Interview #8] A number of people mentioned the commitment to foster youth of former DCF Commissioner Angelo McClain but felt that they did not see his vision being uniformly implemented at the area office level.

7. There is significant variation in DCF practices around working with transition age youth.

Almost all those interviewed think there is significant variation in the approach to and quality of transition planning, the conditions for signing and rescinding voluntary service agreements and the transparency of the process for working with youth. As one attorney said, "The process DCF uses is very caseworker and area office dependent and it depends on whether the youth gets an adolescent outreach worker. My experience is that these workers add a lot of value; on-going caseworkers are very focused on issues of safety." [Interview #30] One judge said, "The quality of the planning is usually a function of how good the caseworker is. If a youth has a really good caseworker then that may be sufficient. However, with the cutbacks at DCF and overworked caseworkers, it is variable." [Interview #2] One of those interviewed thinks that, "DCF is doing an amazing job these days with kids who want to go to college or vocational training programs. But, the toughest kids before 18 are also the toughest kids to do well by after 18." [Interview #44]

8. Variations in practice are often seen as a function of the characteristics of the youth themselves.

While it is clear that the needs and capacities of individual youth require some variation in practices and approaches, many of those interviewed felt that certain groups (college bound youth, youth in independent living, and multi-system involved youth) receive more in the way of planning and transition-related services than others (e.g. those who are not signing voluntary agreements with DCF, those who are going home, or those who are viewed as non-compliant). Others thought that youth who were involved with multiple systems got both the worst and best of planning. If one of the agencies with which they were engaged embraced the role of advocate and coordinator, then these youth often got more in terms of planning. If not, they often received less support as they transitioned out of care.

9. There is significant variation in the process for signing and rescinding agreements for voluntary services and for allowing youth to sign themselves back into care.

A number of those interviewed thought that many youth did not understand their rights around remaining in care. Concern seemed to be greatest around variations in the process for rescinding or “pulling” a youth’s voluntary agreement. One executive director of a youth serving agency said,

“DCF outlines the conditions for the voluntary and when the kid can’t meet them, they pull it. They make kids their own vendors, promise them things like first and last month’s rent deposits and then don’t come through. They don’t take into consideration the trauma these kids have gone through. They don’t allow them to fail and then provide them with a path to get back on track. They often put demands on kids that are unreasonable. They demand they follow through on all the conditions but don’t help them develop the skills and the resources to do it.” [Interview #16]

One of the attorneys said she saw little transition planning for youth when the agency withdrew a voluntary agreement. “These were kids who had been in the system for years and had no family and no external support systems – no models or guides to call on. While the attorneys work for reinstatement or at least a 90-day reprieve for transition planning, they are not always successful.” [Interview #31] In a contrary view, another attorney said she saw DCF as being very flexible. “While they want to see some level of cooperation in the youth, they want them to stay in care. I think that the agency leans over backward to keep kids in care.” [Interview #40]

10. Many caseworkers do not have the expertise needed to work with transition age youth and the system is too dependent on the Preparing Adolescents for Young Adulthood (PAYA) curriculum to build life skills.

A number of those interviewed expressed concern that many caseworkers do not have the skills needed to work with adolescents and are not sufficiently aware of the services needed to support youth as they transition from care. Many felt there needs to be more training for caseworkers around working with this population. Most workers are focused first and foremost on keeping children safe rather than on supporting the transition to independence.

“It is very easy to get caught up in the day-to-day crises and not take the time to do the sort of thoughtful planning one should do. We need a model that holds transition planning equal to the way in which we deal with all the crises and immediate needs. The whole range of stakeholders needs ways to be involved. Transition planning needs to be seen as equal to the planning and energy that goes into addressing crises. Otherwise it always takes a back seat.” [Interview #13]

There was a great deal of support for the work of adolescent outreach workers but a keen sense that the number of workers was insufficient to the task. This left DCF too dependent on PAYA as the means to building life skills.

11. There are a number of systemic barriers to serving youth transitioning out of care.

These systemic barriers include a lack of foster parent involvement, a lack of coordination among agencies, a gap in services for different age groups, a lack of trained advocates, a dearth of affordable and appropriate housing, and a lack of follow-up after youth exit the system. While foster parents have the greatest involvement with youth, none of those interviewed were aware of the new transition planning requirement. They did not know what to ask for, and therefore did not feel they could be helpful in supporting transition planning.

Many of the youth served by the system are involved with multiple agencies. A number of those interviewed felt that coordination needed to be formalized and to involve better coordination among not only the agencies but among DCF, the courts and the attorneys. Several felt that most, if not all, youth need an advocate from outside the system and that this need cannot be fully met by a youth's attorney. It was suggested that foster alumni and CASA volunteers might be able to play this role.

One executive director expressed concern about the lack of follow-up post-departure.

"This is the most critical time in terms of whether the kid will successfully be able to follow the plan. Kids have almost no experience of independence or self-efficacy. Helping them be successful takes a lot of work and a lot of advocacy. Kids don't have the advocates they need. No planning will ever be successful without staff dedicated to after care." [Interview #15]

12. There was general agreement with the principles and practices for transition planning identified in the literature.

The majority of those interviewed thought the three most important principles were (1) that planning be youth-driven, (2) that there be clear accountability for follow-up and (3) that a good assessment of a youth's readiness for participation needs to be done prior to participation planning. There was clear agreement that there needed to be not only assignment of responsibility for each of the actions and outcomes included in the plan but clear accountability for following up on progress in accomplishing the plan. While there was a strong sense that the planning process needs to be youth-driven, there was concern that youth needed to be prepared to participate in the process and that allowing youth too much leadership without preparation is a recipe for failure. "While the process needs to be youth-driven, most of these youth don't have any experience in this and will need support. They can help set the agenda but cannot be tasked with this on their own." [Interview #31] Part of being youth-driven is giving youth the opportunity to build the skills they need to take a leadership role.

"We don't give these youth enough opportunity to learn and to practice a full range of life skills. In some ways not enough is done for them and in other ways too much is done. We assume they are in a better position than they are. We need to do a better job of laying out options for them. Kids don't know how to set an agenda. Too often we ask them to do this and then allow them to fail without a second chance and a way to learn from their mistakes." [Interview #12]

13. While collaborative, conference-based transition planning has a number of advantages, there are a number of cautions about the structure and process.

Advantages:

- The process sends a message to the youth that there is a team behind them. It gets everyone around the table and says to youth that they matter.
- It brings more resources, knowledge, and perspectives to the table. Because no one knows everything or has all the answers, it makes sense to bring more people into the process. It provides a scaffold that can help support youth as they exit care.
- It expands the universe of those helping youth beyond the caseworker, whom the youth may view as the person who removed them from their home. It moves planning from a closed to an open process and allows all the agencies and significant adults in the youth's life to play a role.
- It allows a number of people to share responsibility for supporting the youth and for following up on different aspects of the plan. It allows people to step forward in ways short of having the youth live with them.

Possible Disadvantages:

- The involvement of too many people could be overwhelming to some youth.
- Without good facilitation the process could be counter-productive.
- Having more people involved could make it harder for someone to be accountable for monitoring and moving the process forward.
- Some youth may feel they have no one to bring to the table.
- The planning conference may be perceived by the youth as "just one more meeting." Some youth are subject to a number of transition planning processes (mental health, education, etc.). If foster care transition planning is not well coordinated with these other processes, it is likely to be ineffective.

14. An effective process needs to start early and involve multiple meetings.

Most people thought that multiple meetings would be important to keeping the process moving forward and to reinforcing accountability. Multiple meetings would allow youth a chance to fail, to do better next time, and to gain problem-solving skills. It would also remind the youth that "people are rooting for them" and that "if they are stuck, they have a chance to get unstuck." [Interview #34]

A number of those interviewed stated that planning ought to begin significantly in advance of a youth's 18th birthday, even as young as 14, in order to build their sense of responsibility for their future. One person said, " By the time their goal is changed to APPLA [Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement], kids are so burnt out on the system that they can't focus on what they need to make happen for themselves. "[Interview #34]

15. Youth are more likely to participate fully if they have an independent advocate at the table.

One of the clinicians interviewed said that "the challenge is to get beyond a kid's first response, which is to say that they don't want to participate and there is no one they want to participate with them." [Interview #13] Another said,

"Transition planning has to involve those who are closest to the kid. Youth need to play a big role. They need to learn how to advocate for themselves. But they also need to know that there is someone who shares the responsibility for making things happen." [Interview #39]

One of the judges interviewed said,

"Kids need to pull away from DCF. You can't have an effective process if kids see it as part of DCF. This is the place where CASA could be helpful. You need to have people who understand adolescents." [Interview #4]

One of the alumni interviewed said,

"Kids need to know they have an advocate-- someone they can depend on in the process. They need someone to make sure they are being given and understand all the options -- someone who is objective. Youth need help from different groups so that they can fully get the picture of what is being offered. You can't have adults getting together beforehand and creating the agenda and the actions without the youth. Kids want to be taken for who they really are -- their dreams and their terrors. They need a full plate of opportunities. Alumni can play a critical role in dissecting the things that are being offered. There ought to be someone there that the child can relate to personally, who has gone through the same experience as they have. The power of that cannot be measured. They are the experts." [Interview #41]

A number of attorneys stated that a youth's attorney should be at the table. However, they felt it was important that other participants in the process need to understand that the attorney's job is not "best interest" representation. Perhaps most importantly, one of those interviewed noted that, "The best planning happens through relationships. Unless a youth has a relationship with someone in the conference, it is unlikely to be successful." [Interview #12]

16. Good facilitation is critical to a good process. There could also be advantages to having someone from outside DCF facilitate the process.

A number of people thought it could be helpful to have someone from outside of DCF facilitate the process. This individual could bring new energy and a new perspective to the process. Several people mentioned that youth, many of whom have become disillusioned with DCF, might have more trust in an outside agency. They also thought that DCF “will never have the time/attention for this sort of deep and intentional work.” [Interview #21] In the end, though, many of those interviewed said that it was a matter of resources. “The real challenge is that there simply are not enough resources there. No matter how good the planning is, nothing can happen unless there are resources there to carry out the plan.” [Interview #12]

IX Recommendations

The recommendations below are based on our review of the literature, interviews with those using the models described above and conversations with local stakeholders. Implementing some of these recommendations would require significant changes to the new DCF permanency Planning policy described in the July 2013 Training Draft (Appendix 1). Others would require more modest changes.

1. The DCF process for developing written transition plans should be consistent with the principles and practices for transition planning recommended in the literature.

- Youth-driven/Individually tailored
 - *Youth sets/helps set agenda.*
 - *Youth is given specific preparation to participate in/lead the meeting.*
- Strengths-based
 - *Agenda is specifically structured to build on and/or recognize youth’s strengths.*
- Age/developmentally appropriate
 - *Model specifically includes assessment prior to planning.*
- Structured to enhance problem-solving skills, self-efficacy and confidence
 - *Multiple conferences allow youth to build decision-making skills.*
 - *Youth is given significant preparation prior to participation.*
- Emphasis on finding and promoting permanency connections
 - *Permanency is a required topic of discussion.*
 - *The process incorporates the participation of supportive adults.*
- Addresses experiences that have led to a loss of Identity or distrust of permanent connections
 - *Issue of internal/psychological transition is expressly addressed in the structure or content of the planning process.*
- Incorporates family of origin where appropriate
 - *Process specifically addresses the issue of family of origin participation.*
- Addresses basic needs
 - *Agenda is structured to make sure that issues of housing, employment, health care and education are addressed.*

- Accountability for the plan
 - *Someone is specifically accountable for following up (with the youth and the conference participants) as to whether progress is being made in accomplishing the plan.*
 - Process facilitated by trained professionals
 - *Facilitators should have training in youth development.*
 - Systemic support/interagency collaboration
 - *Process expressly addresses the need for interagency collaboration where relevant.*
2. **The DCF transition planning process should be transparent.** The public and especially foster parents, attorneys and those providing direct services to transition age youth should have a clear understanding of the Department's transition planning process and the opportunities for non-agency individuals to support youth in the process. At present, DCF has provided a brief description in the Permanency Planning Policy of the elements to be addressed in the plan but almost no description of the planning process itself.
 3. **While the transition planning process needs to be individualized to the youth, there should be a core set of elements, which ensures that all youth have access to high quality transition planning.**
 4. **There should be clear accountability for tracking and monitoring of the action items identified in transition plans.** The only way for a plan to be more than a list on a piece of paper is for someone to own making sure progress is being made on the action items.
 5. **Caseworkers involved in transition planning should receive specialized training in working with adolescents.** DCF should establish an adolescent service with social workers and outreach workers who have specialized training in dealing with adolescents and transition-related issues and processes.
 6. **DCF should find ways for alumni to serve as resources to youth in the planning process.** Consideration should be given to working with both of the state's alumni organizations to develop a way in which alumni might serve as formal advocates for youth in the process.
 7. **Judges, attorneys, guardians *ad litem*, and court appointed special advocates should be given training around what constitutes a good transition plan and the steps they can take to support effective transition planning.**
 8. **Judges should be provided with a checklist of questions to ask youth in order to ascertain whether they were truly engaged in the planning process and understand the plan that has been presented to the court.**
 9. **Judges should be provided with sample transition plans, which set a high standard for the level of thoroughness and detail they should expect to see in plans submitted by DCF.**

10. Partnerships should be developed that support better collaboration and coordination among DCF, the courts and youths' attorneys around transition planning.

In summary, DCF needs to develop and implement a transparent, well-articulated process for working with youth to develop written transition plans. The legal community needs to support this process with effective training for judges, attorneys and guardians *ad litem* in order to make sure that youth are well served by the process. All those who care about and work with transition age youth need to have an opportunity to help support youth and DCF in the process of developing and implementing effective transition plans.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Department of Children and Families Permanency Planning Policy

Policy 2013-01. Effective July 1, 2013

<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dcf/policies/permanency-planning-policy.pdf>

Appendix 2

Youth Readiness Assessment Tool

<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dcf/policies/youth-readiness-assessment-tool.pdf>

Appendix 3

(See next page)

Appendix 3

E Makua Ana Youth Circle

*A Collaboration of the Hawaii Department of Human Services and
Effective Planning and Innovative Communication, Inc. (EPIC)*

E Makua Ana Youth Circles are conducted with transition age foster youth in Hawaii by a non-profit organization, Effective Planning and Innovative Communication, Inc. (EPIC). Hawaii's child welfare system is state-based and EPIC facilitates Youth Circles for foster youth across the state. The Youth Circle model is based on Resiliency Theory and the Family Group Decision Making model. Youth Circles are intended to be positive and solution-focused and to incorporate a problem-solving approach.

EPIC targets 16 and 17 year-olds for Youth Circles. Eligible youth include those currently in foster care, those under legal guardianship, and those who have been adopted through care. Current and former foster care youth are also eligible for a Youth Circle until their 22nd birthday if they are also eligible for higher education grants. Youth Circles are optional but all 16 year olds in foster care are encouraged to participate in at least one. EPIC hopes to have three Youth Circles for each youth before he or she exits care.

Facilitators are specially trained EPIC staff who have experience with children and preferably a master's degree. They are trained in group facilitation and engaging youth, and knowledgeable about the services available to support youth aging out of care. New facilitators are mentored by an experienced facilitator for about a year before facilitating their first Youth Circle on their own.

Prior to the Youth Circle, the facilitator meets with the youth to learn about their current situation and goals. The facilitator explains the Youth Circle process, specifically highlighting where the youth is expected to contribute. The facilitator asks the youth to choose whom to invite to the circle. Youth are encouraged to invite supportive adults (including biological family as appropriate) as well as people important to decision making such as their social worker, guardian *ad litem*, etc. Significant weight is given to the youth's choices and EPIC will arrange for an agency representative to stand in for a social worker in the rare instance the youth does not want his or her social worker to participate.

The Youth Circle uses a strengths-based approach. Any mistakes or weaknesses are not to be discussed at the circle. EPIC facilitators prepare participants to understand and adopt this approach. The circles have a set agenda. The youth opens the Youth Circle with a poem/song/prayer/etc. of their choice and introduces the participants. The facilitator then describes the purpose of the Youth Circle, as well as guidelines such as respect and confidentiality. The youth describes his or her proudest accomplishment and then his or her strengths. The rest of the participants then share their sense of the youth's strengths. The youth then identifies his or her goals for when they leave care. Next, the youth and participants brainstorm options regarding seven domains: housing, education, finances, employment, documents, transportation, and physical and emotional health. An EPIC recorder keeps notes of the discussion on a large sheet of paper visible to all the participants. After the brainstorming session, the youth has private time where he or she creates a transition plan. The youth returns to the circle, presents the transition plan and is helped to develop a timeline for each goal. Participants then volunteer to help the youth achieve certain of the goals. A date is set for the Re-Circle and the facilitator has the youth and participants complete evaluations of the process. Afterwards, the participants and the youth share food chosen by the youth.

The process of having multiple Youth Circles can help the youth develop decision-making and problem-solving skills. At the Re-Circles, all previous participants and any others the youth wants to attend are invited. The youth again opens the circle and introduces the participants. The Facilitator restates the purpose and guidelines. The youth describes any good things that have happened since the last circle. Once again, the youth and participants identify the youth's strengths and the youth describes his or her goals. The transition plan created in the last circle is reviewed and revised and it is determined whether members of the circle have followed through with their assigned tasks. The youth again has private time where he or she creates a revised transition plan and then presents the transition plan to the participants. Volunteers and timelines are noted and a re-circle date is set.

Appendix 4

GOALS

(Growth Opportunities Achieve Lifelong Success)

San Francisco County Family and Children's Services

San Francisco County uses a collaborative, conference-based process called GOALS (Growth Opportunities Achieve Lifelong Success) as one of their primary planning tools for youth aging out of care. The GOALS process is grounded in the Family Team Decision Making model and is managed by the Team Decision Making Unit of Family and Children Services (FCS). The GOALS conference brings together adults whom a youth believes can help identify and accomplish a set of transition-related goals. GOALS conferences are intended to serve as the time, place, and location for the primary caseworker to:

- Discuss goals identified by the youth
- Identify specific steps and activities and those responsible for achieving them
- Identify referrals to services and resources
- Capture progress towards achieving identified goals¹

GOALS is one of three processes used by San Francisco County to assist youth in setting and accomplishing goals related to their transition from care. The other two are mandated by the state and include the provision of Independent Living Skills Programming (ILSP) and the development of a Transition to Independent Living Plan (TILP). The TILP is a two-page form that is first filled in at age 14.5 and then updated every six months until a youth leaves care.

Youth become eligible for the GOALS process when they turn 16. After an initial conference at age 16, GOALS conferences are scheduled once every six months. Eligible youth include those in out-of-home care and non-relative legal guardianships. While all youth are expected to participate in GOALS, FCS has found it challenging to offer GOALS to youth who have serious mental health issues, youth who are out-of-state or in distant placements, and youth who are on the run (although even these sometimes participate). While Skype has made it easier to address the needs of those in distant placements, FCS has found group process work difficult using this medium.

The county's GOALS coordinator and the youth's primary caseworker are responsible for organizing the GOALS meeting. A computerized system generates a notice to the GOALS coordinator that a youth will turn 16 within the next 45 days. The coordinator then notifies the caseworker that a GOALS meeting should be scheduled. The expectation is that the meeting will be scheduled within 30-45 days of a youth's 16th birthday and then every six months thereafter to ensure that progress is being made. The caseworker is responsible for making sure that all relevant information, such as school transcripts, is available at the meeting.

In advance of the meeting, the caseworker meets with the youth. If it is a first GOALS meeting, the caseworker orients the youth to the process and works collaboratively to decide who should attend the

¹ Frequently Asked Questions, v 2 provided by Robin Love, Program Manager II (0K0A), CCSF Human Services Agency, DHS Family & Children's Services Division

meeting. The youth and the caseworker then determine the issues on which the youth would like to focus. If the meeting is not an initial GOALS meeting, the group might review the progress has been made since the last meeting and determine whether additional items should be added to the agenda. The youth's caseworker is responsible for getting the youth to the meeting but can ask the GOALS coordinator for help in making sure other invitees are planning on attending. Youth do not receive any training specific to taking a leadership role in the meeting. While a caseworker will encourage a youth to invite his or her caregivers, CASA, ISLP advocate or other adult with whom they have a significant relationship, the final decision about all attendees is made by the youth. Meetings are run by a trained facilitator from FCS's Team Decision-Making Unit.

At the opening of the meeting, the GOALS coordinator explains the purpose of the meeting and emphasizes that they will always re-direct participants when the youth's voice is not being heard, when the youth is not providing input, or the youth's body language indicates a check-in is needed. The youth is then asked to talk about his/her hopes and dreams for the future. This is followed by discussion of the domains the youth has identified for discussion in addition to baseline topics of education, employment and permanency. Permanency (e.g. life-long supportive connections and reconnection to the birth family if possible) is addressed in the meeting. The goal is to ensure that each youth has five permanent connections before leaving care. The psychological issues related to transitioning are not an explicit focus of the meeting. If the youth is between 17 and 21, the group is supposed to make sure that an ISLP assessment has been done. Optimally, the TILP, the GOALS plan, and the youth's case plan should present a consistent picture of the plan for the youth's future.

At the end of their initial meeting, the youth receives a resource packet intended to facilitate connecting with a wide range of resources (e.g. housing, health care, education, etc.). A written plan is developed and copies are distributed to everyone who attended the meeting. Notes are kept of the meeting but are not included in the plan. In general, GOALS meetings last about an hour and a half. A GOALS meeting is not held if a youth does not show up.

Action items can be assigned to any of the meeting participants. The caseworker has primary responsibility for making sure that progress is being made. Overall accountability rests with the supervisor of the program. While action items are assigned to the various participants, the primary caseworker is responsible for following up on commitments made in the meeting and for seeing that the youth is making progress in accomplishing the goals. While the caseworker can call on participants to support the youth in achieving goals, there is not an explicit process for making sure this happens other than the every six months re-conference. The structure of subsequent GOALS meetings is similar to the initial meetings except that the focus is more on follow up than on the creation of goals.

Appendix 5

Youth Transition Conferences

Hennepin Count, Minnesota Child Protection Services

Minnesota has a county-run child welfare system where youth can remain in care until age 21. Since 2003, Hennepin County has used a model called Youth Transition Conferences (YTC). YTC is described as “a process where young people take the lead in planning for their futures”² and as “a process that helps build a circle of support to develop a blueprint and resources for independence.”³ While the conferences are voluntary, youth are strongly urged to participate. They are offered the opportunity to have a YTC between the ages of 16 and 17. The conferences are designed to give youth an opportunity to develop and exercise skills in decision making, goal setting and results monitoring. For this reason, the goal is that each youth will have three to five -- but as many as 10 -- conferences every three to four months.

In general, YTCs are used for youth in long-term foster care but the criteria are flexible and they can also be used for youth who are not in out-of-home placement. Because there is a significant focus on youth as the drivers of the process, it does not work well for those who are currently experiencing a mental health crisis, substance abuse, or serious parent/child relationship concerns.

Prior to the conference, a youth and their caregiver fill out a “Your Youth Transition Conference” referral form with dates and times when they and the social worker are available. By signing the form, the youth agrees to participate and to have the facilitator contact the people the youth would like to attend. The form is then sent to the Family Group Conference supervisor who assigns a facilitator trained in Family Group Decision Making and assisting youth in transition. The extent of conference preparation varies depending on the youth, the caseworker and the facilitator. Sometimes they meet in advance in person, sometimes by phone.

Other than the caseworker, who is required to attend, the youth determines the list of invitees. The department does not particularly try to influence a youth’s choice. It will share with the youth the types of people they might want to think about inviting but will not push the youth in any particular direction in regard to invitees. The Department sees this as a learning process. The Department believes that having the foster parent(s) attend is very helpful and sees it as a red flag if a youth decides not to invite them.

The meeting has an established format:

- 1. Information sharing.** The conference opens with the facilitator reviewing the purpose and the ground rules including that this is the youth’s meeting. The youth and the other attendees then discuss the youth’s strengths before moving onto a discussion of life domains. These include education, employment, finances, housing, health and fitness, and documents. The attendees are then asked to assess the youth’s needs and strengths, and to identify the resources available for each domain. The discussion focuses on the domains that are most important at that point in the youth’s life. For example, if the youth is 16 and in a stable placement then the issue of

² Youth in Transition [Brochure], Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health Department

³ Youth in Transition [Brochure], Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health Department

housing is not likely to be a significant focus. This part of the discussion is very fluid and depends on the youth and his or her particular needs and life stage. As the discussion unfolds, notes are made on a large piece of paper.

2. **Plan development.** The youth is asked which parts of the discussion he or she wants to capture for the plan. The group works collaboratively to develop the plan and to assign people to follow up on each task by a certain date.
3. **Plan Review.** The youth reviews and approves the plan and a follow up conference is scheduled.

While permanency is not a significant focus of the process, short and long-term connections are discussed. Short-term connections are people on whom the youth can depend to do things like take them to register for classes at community college. Long-term connections might be individuals with whom the youth can spend holidays after leaving care.

The plan is put into a standard computerized format. It is reviewed and signed by everyone who attended the meeting. The group decides when they will meet for a progress check. There is not a formal process for follow up on plan items. To the extent that there is follow up between meetings, it is the responsibility of the caseworker and the youth. The Department has found that the situations are usually so dynamic that it works best to depend on the follow up conferences as the primary means of accountability.

Appendix 6

Youth Life Conferencing[®] *South Florida Family Counseling Center, Inc.*

The Youth Life Conferencing (YLC) model was developed by the South Florida Center for Family Counseling, which was under contract to provide transition planning services to youth aging out of care in Miami and Dade Counties. The YLC model consisted of:

1. A transition planning conference - the Youth Life Conference
2. Weekly follow up and monitoring of progress
3. Monthly curriculum-based youth peer support group meetings over 24 months (12 months each pre- and post-emancipation).

The goal of Youth Life Conferencing, which was modeled on Family Group Decision Making, was the “development of a comprehensive, holistic and measureable plan for the youth...in order to gain self-sufficiency and independent meaningful living.”⁴ The opportunity to participate in Youth Life Conferencing was made available to all youth in out- of-home, non-relative placement in Miami and Dade Counties. At the time the model was used, all youth in Florida exited care at age 18.

The program was launched with an event to which all youth who would turn 17 in the following 12 months were invited. The goal was to introduce them to the program and to encourage them to participate. This was followed by a letter describing the opportunity. The center then reached out to youth as they approached their 17th birthday.

The conferences included a wide range of agency and non-agency individuals. It was required a youth's case manager attend. The center worked especially hard to ensure that both foster and birth families participated in the conferences. The conferences were facilitated by masters-level facilitators trained in youth engagement and the Bridges to Transition framework, a ten-session curriculum (developed by Walden Family Services) designed for guiding groups of teens through the transition of leaving foster care.

The conferences had a strong sense of ritual, which focused on the youth's strengths. Each opened with a ceremony in which a rock was passed around as participants talked about the youth's strengths as represented by the rock. While the agenda was fixed and addressed eight domains -- housing, education, employment, family connection, community connection and support, medical/therapeutic, life skills and emotional skills -- the youth was always asked, “Is there anything we have not covered that is important to you?” The conference ended with each of the participants saying something positive about the youth. The output was a written transition plan called a Youth Life Plan.

During the conference, the youth's status on each of the eight domains was assigned a current and projected score of 1-5 using a scoring key. This became the starting point for tracking the youth's progress in each of the domains over the next year. These scores were entered into a database, which allowed progress to be reviewed at both at the individual and a population level. Each participant in the conference received a copy of the plan as well as the key to the scoring system. This allowed them to

⁴ Youth Life Conferencing Program [Brochure] South Florida Center for Family Counseling, Inc.

participate in rescoring the youth as the youth moved towards independence. Each month the score was updated based on ongoing contact with the youth, his or her independent living worker, their GAL and others, as well as on their own assessments in the monthly peer support group.

A YLC counselor followed up with the youth weekly. The caseworker could call on the participants in the conference to ensure that the youth was receiving the support needed to make progress. The counselor entered notes weekly into both the center's and the state's database.

Each youth was also assigned, according to the month in which they turned 17, to a curriculum-based monthly peer support group. These meetings used a modified version of the Bridges to Independence framework to support the youth in making the internal/emotional transitions necessary for a successful exit from foster care. The meetings were designed to continue for one year after the youth left care in order to support their continued transition.

Appendix 7

Circles of Support

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

Texas, which has a state-run child welfare system and allows youth to remain in care until age 21, has used a model called Circles of Support (COS) since 2004 to develop transition plans for youth aging out of care. In 2011, the state completed just over 3000 circles. The COS model, which is based on Family Group Decision Making, brings together a group of caring adults to help a youth develop a plan for their transition from care.

The circles are intended to serve as the place where transition plans are developed and where networks of support are identified and strengthened. It is expected that youth will be involved in planning every aspect of the meetings. A youth and a Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) staff member work in advance to identify the youth's goals and needs and to prepare a list of people to be invited to the meeting. It is estimated that each COS meeting requires between 12 to 40 hours of staff time for preparation, including meeting with the youth, scheduling participants, etc.

Youth are identified at age 15.5 as eligible for a COS meeting. The COS meeting is generally scheduled when the youth is 16. The conferences are optional but are offered to all youth for whom the state has custody. The youth can be in kinship care, traditional foster care, or in a group home setting. The state's goal is that each youth will have at least one circle before they leave care. Ideally, they will have more. If a youth chooses not to have a COS meeting, the youth will automatically participate in the state's annually required "Transition Plan Meeting", which involves a smaller group of people (e.g. the youth, a caregiver, and the social worker) and is more agency-driven rather than youth-driven.

Youth determine who will attend. If a youth decides to invite and reconnect with biological family members, regulations require that sufficient preparation be done to ensure that this can be done safely. Youth are also offered specific assistance with the emotional issues this may raise. The issue of permanency is addressed by asking youth to include important people in their lives in the meeting and through the considerable effort expended to get family and non-family members to attend.

The meetings are facilitated by trained staff within the Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) unit of Child Protective Services (CPS). The facilitators have at least five years of experience with CPS or an organization engaged in related work and have completed a four-day training in the FGDM.

The Agenda

The agenda is structured as follows:

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Youth opening/tradition (optional)
3. Clarifying the purpose of the conference
4. Sharing of hopes and dreams for the youth
5. Identification of the youth's strengths
6. Needs and concerns specifically identified by the youth
7. Identification of resources available to the youth
8. Youth and circle of support private time (optional)
9. Presentation of youth's transition plan

10. Discuss Re-conference if Needed

11. Closing of the Conference

Youth decides which topics will be discussed in addition to the required domains of housing, employment/source of income, education, developmental disabilities (if relevant), health and personal needs, family/caring adults/community network. The state is currently working to add the domains of transportation and life skills.

Youth are allowed private time with non-agency participants in the circle before the transition plan is finalized. This can help ensure that the plan truly reflects a youth's needs and concerns. The marketing materials aimed at informing youth about the COS option emphasize that the department wants to hear their voice and that a COS meeting is a way to make that happen. The state has found, however, that there can be tension between the agency wanting the meetings to be youth-centered and their also wanting to accomplish agency objectives once they have everyone in the same room.

Appendix 8

Transition Roundtables

*Georgia Department of Human Services/Division of Family and Children Services
In collaboration with
Casey Family Programs*

Georgia, which has a state-administered child welfare system, allows youth to remain in care until age 21. In 2011, the state began implementing Transition Roundtables (TRT), a concept developed in collaboration with Casey Family Programs that builds on the concept of Permanency Roundtables. Georgia requires TRTs for all youth age 17 or older. The meetings can be done earlier under certain conditions. After an initial TRT, there is a meeting when a youth is age 17.5 to assess progress on goals established in the initial TRT. The process also includes a meeting 90 days before a youth leaves care to ensure that he or she has a plan that meets the requirements of Fostering Connections and Increasing Adoptions Act.

Using a highly structured agenda, grounded in a clearly articulated set of values and beliefs, the TRT engages youth and a group of agency and non-agency personnel in a dialogue aimed at three goals: (1) expediting legal permanence; (2) developing a Transition Action Plan; and (3) leaving youth feeling understood, appreciated, hopeful and with an understanding of the options, the transition plan and the available resources. The goal of the transition roundtable is to achieve legal permanence for every youth before they exit care. While the focus is squarely on permanence, the model also recognizes that typically there are transition-related issues that youth need to address, such education and employment, whether or not they achieve legal permanence.

Prior to an initial Transition Roundtables, a youth meets with his or her case managers or Independent Living Coordinators to:

- Review their Ansell-Casey assessments
- Identify permanency and wellbeing goals
- Understand their role in the process
- Assess where they are in terms of other issues such as housing, education, etc.
- Receive a resource packet including: Foster Club's Transition Tool Kit and the documents 21 Things You Must Do Before You Leave Care.
- Assess his or her status using the Readiness for Permanence scale developed by Foster Club

These pre-meetings are seen as critically important and are viewed by some as the single most important factor in determining the success of a TRT.

Roundtables include standing as well as meeting-specific participants. Standing members include the independent living coordinator, who serves as facilitator, a master practitioner, who serves as co-facilitator, a permanency expeditor, and an educational support monitor under certain specified conditions. The meeting-specific members can include adults that a youth has identified as allies, caregivers (unless the youth says no), and the youth's caseworker and the caseworker's supervisor. Independent Living Coordinators and caseworkers generally try to influence the choice of allies in order to make sure that everyone who could be helpful is in attendance. Ultimately, though, the specific invitation list is determined by the youth.

All facilitators have participated in a one-day training in facilitating permanency roundtables and have additional training in dealing with teens in transition. The Division of Family and Children's Services has begun to train CASA volunteers to serve as facilitators in order to be able to serve every youth in a timely manner.

The Roundtable agenda includes the following elements:

1. Welcome
2. Case history presentation by the youth or designee followed by comments from case-specific team members
3. Clarification and exploration of what was presented and other aspects of the case
4. Brainstorming – what will it take to achieve permanency?
5. Creating the Transition Action Plan – what it will take to implement each strategy?
6. Debrief – what was the experience like for the youth, are there unanswered questions, how can the process be improved for other youth?

At present, the TRT process deals almost exclusively with external issues related to transition. However, there is an interest on the part of some program administrators to have the Roundtables address psychological issues especially ones that could impact achieving permanence. There has been some concern that adults in the Roundtable meetings avoid these issues because they are not sure how to address them and fear that opening the agenda to these issues could overwhelm the focus on permanence.

Each TRT results in the development of a Transition Action Plan. Anyone who is at a meeting can be assigned to follow up on an item in the plan. Youth also have items for which they are responsible. Everyone who attends receives a copy of the plan. A caseworker or Independent Living Coordinator is responsible for completing a monthly assessment of progress. In addition, they work with youth to rescore their "Readiness for Permanence" using the 10-point Foster Club scale. Consistent tracking is intended to alert staff if little or no progress is being made.

Appendix 9

Preparing Youth For Adulthood

A Collaboration of

Washington DC CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates)

The District of Columbia Family Court

The District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA)

The Preparing Youth for Adulthood program (PYA) was launched in 2007 to help youth prepare for independence and to enhance coordination among agencies and organizations that provide services to transitioning adolescents. The program has two primary components:

1. Transition planning meetings, which occur once every three months. The youth, his or her CASA, case worker and any supporters the youth chooses come together to create and monitor a transition plan.
2. Preparation Hearings - twice yearly court hearings to review progress in meeting transition plan goals. These hearings alternate with twice yearly Permanency Hearings.

The Preparing for Adulthood program is voluntary. To participate, youth must be between 17.5 and 19 years old, have a permanency plan goal of APPLA, and agree to three conditions: (1) meet with their CASA at least twice a month, (2) have their case assigned to the judge presiding over the initiative, and (3) actively engage in the process (i.e. attend all meetings and hearings, communicate with all parties involved in the case, etc.)

Once a youth is enrolled in the program, an initial meeting is held. The group then meets every three months to review progress. The meetings focus on eight life domains (housing, finances, life connections, crisis management, health, educational/vocational, emotional/psychological, other). The following are identified for each domain: a goal(s); one or more action items; the party responsible; and the dates by which the action items must be completed (no more than 45 days). The product of the meetings is a completed Individualized Transitional Independent Living Plan (ITILP), which is signed by everyone who has attended the meeting. The ITILP is seen as a living document and may be revised at any of the planning meetings or at the Preparation Hearings. At a minimum, the youth, the social worker, the CASA, and the assigned Independent Living Specialist must attend the planning meetings. The meetings may not take place if all four required people are not there. In addition, youth can request that others be invited (e.g. their GAL, case manager, foster parents, birth parents, etc.)

An up-to-date ITILP is submitted to the court three to five days before each Preparation Hearing. At the Preparation Hearings, the judge reviews the plan and determines whether sufficient progress has been made during the previous six months. The goal is to use the influence of the court to ensure that progress is being made and that youth are receiving the services and supports necessary to achieve independence. The youth, the social worker, and the CASA must attend the Preparation Hearings.

The CASA Senior Manager for Transitioning Youth reported that, "It can take a year to get the youth really engaged in the process. That's why it is critical to continue to meet every three months. It's amazing to see their progress. They go from wondering why we are having these meetings to emailing

us and asking us to RSVP to their transition planning meeting." ⁵ He also reported that the program has substantially strengthened the relationship between CASA, CSFA and the Family Court. Judge Nolan, the judge who oversees the PYA program echoed that sentiment: "Once they buy in, once they're engaged in the program, they want to advocate for themselves, and they take on a different role in the courtroom. It's almost as if they don't need the attorney, and they run the meetings." ⁶

⁵ <https://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm?event=website.viewArticles&issueid=137&articleid=3572>

⁶ <https://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm?event=website.viewArticles&issueid=137&articleid=3572>

Appendix 10

Recommended principles and practices for transition planning

- 1. Youth-driven/Individually tailored**
 - a. Youth sets/helps set agenda.*
 - b. Youth is given specific preparation to participate in/lead the meeting.*
- 2. Strengths-based**
 - a. Agenda is specifically structured to build on and/or recognize youth's strengths.*
- 3. Age/developmentally appropriate**
 - a. Model specifically includes assessment prior to planning.*
- 4. Structured to enhance problem solving skills, self-efficacy and confidence**
 - a. Multiple conferences allow youth to build decision-making skills.*
 - b. Youth is given significant preparation prior to participation.*
- 5. Emphasis on finding and promoting permanent connections**
 - a. Permanency is a required topic of discussion.*
 - b. Planning process incorporates the participation of supportive adults.*
- 6. Addresses experiences that have led to loss of Identity or distrust of permanent connections**
 - a. Issue of internal/psychological transition is expressly addressed in the structure or content of the planning process.*
- 7. Incorporates family of origin where appropriate**
 - a. Planning process specifically addresses the issue of family of origin participation.*
- 8. Addresses basic needs**
 - a. Agenda is structured to make sure that issues of housing, employment, health care and education are addressed.*
- 9. Accountability for the plan**
 - a. Someone is specifically accountable for following up (with the youth and the conference participants) on whether progress is being made in accomplishing action items.*
- 10. Process facilitated by trained professionals**
 - a. Facilitators have training in youth development.*
- 11. Systemic support/interagency collaboration**
 - a. Planning process addresses need for interagency collaboration where relevant.*

Appendix 11

TO: Foster Youth Stakeholder Community

FROM: Gail Garinger, The Child Advocate
Elizabeth L. March, Fellow – Office of the Child Advocate

RE: Transition Planning

This memo is intended to give you an overview of ways in which a number of “conference-based” transition planning processes seek to achieve the common goal of preparing and monitoring a written plan for youth transitioning from care. As part of its Transition Planning Project, the Office of the Child Advocate identified a number of different approaches being used across the country and took a detailed look at seven programs:

12. Transition Roundtables – Georgia
13. Circles of Support – Texas
14. GOALS (Growth Opportunities Achieve Life Long Success) - San Francisco County
15. Youth Transition Conferences - Hennepin County, MN
16. Youth Life Conferencing – South Florida Counseling Center (Miami and Dade Counties)
17. E Makua Ana Youth Circle – Hawaii
18. Preparing Youth for Adulthood – Washington DC

Each of these programs—none of which has been formally evaluated—incorporates many of the principles and practices for transition planning recommended in the literature. Their common characteristic is that each brings a youth together with a group of agency and non-agency adults to help plan for the youth’s exit from care. While the programs share the common core of being “conference-based,” they vary along a number of critical dimensions, including:

- Responsibility – The process can be managed by the child welfare agency, contracted out to a non-profit organization or involve collaboration among multiple entities.
- Youth Participation and Leadership – Youth participation can be optional or required. The extent of preparation for the youth to take a leadership role can vary from modest to significant.
- Frequency – The conference can be a one-time event, scheduled as needed, or occur at regularly scheduled intervals.
- Permanence - Conferences can seek to identify and include adults who might serve as permanent, life-long connections for the youth or can focus on achieving a permanent, legal relationship for the youth before they leave care.
- Tracking Progress – The systems for accountability and tracking of progress can vary widely, from having one person with clear responsibility for follow up and a computer-based system for tracking progress, to more diffuse accountability and tracking progress primarily through follow-up conferences.

Each of these programs started with the common idea of bringing together a group of agency and non-agency adults to help a youth prepare for their exit from care, but went about accomplishing this in a variety of ways. Our interest at this point is getting your thoughts on formalizing a conference-based approach to transition planning for foster youth in Massachusetts.

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Annotated Bibliography

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www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/systems/nytd/about_nytd.htm.

On their website, the Administration for Children and Families describes the Chafee requirement to collect data on former foster youth. Specifically, states are required to collect data on demographic and outcome assessments at ages 17, 19, and 21. The deadline for the first report data from states was May 15, 2011.

Allen, M. (2004, updated 2005). Teens Aging Out of Foster Care in Oregon: A Guide To Transition Planning for Caseworkers, Judges, and Advocates. Juvenile Rights Project, Inc. Retrieved July 24, 2012 at <http://www.jrplaw.org/Documents/Teens%20Aging%20Out%20of%20Foster%20Care%20in%20Oregon.pdf>.

Allen explores current research on outcome data for former foster youth and specifically analyzes Oregon's transition planning process. Allen emphasizes importance of permanency, and that the child welfare system's needs to provide transition age youth with resources and connections. She specifies that a transition plan must be comprehensive not just a checklist. Within Oregon, transition planning begins with assessing the strengths and needs of the youth (through a survey or through group circles called Youth Decision Meetings). Each youth and his or her support team identify and define problems and goals and then develop a comprehensive plan establishing goals for housing, education, employment, physical and mental health, and community support. The support team not only helps a youth determine his or her goals but also ensures the youth is aware of different resources and opportunities.

Altschuler, D., Stangler, G., Berkley, K., & Burton, L. (2009). Supporting Youth in Transition to Adulthood: Lessons Learned from Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice. The Center for Juvenile Justice and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.

In this extensive report, Altschuler et al., describe current issues and problems that exist with regards to youth ageing out of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Subsequently, the authors analyze factors that predict success (centrality of family, education and training, opportunities to experience and select career paths, social and civic engagement, and a web of supportive relationships). Altschuler et al., explain that youth need to attain connection by age 25 and to do this they need to be able to establish relationships, attained education, have employment skills, and be able to contribute to the well-being of others. The authors analyze reform in both systems and note that best practices of assessment in the child welfare system involve engaging the child, family, and other related adults as a team to gather information, plan, and make decisions. They also stress that child welfare systems need to adapt to provide developmentally appropriate services to older foster care youth. Lastly, the authors specify what is needed to best achieve permanency, employment, education, and systems of care. They describe in detail a new system in Tennessee that incorporates these principles.

Atkinson, M. (2008). Aging Out of Foster Care: Towards a Universal Safety Net for Former Foster Care Youth, Melinda Atkinson. *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review*.

Atkinson argues that states should provide a universal safety net of services for former foster youth regardless of whether they meet educational or vocational requirements. She insists such services should include mentorship, daily life skills training, housing support, job training, healthcare, counseling services, educational scholarships, and emergency contacts. She also emphasizes that the program should be flexible to allow youth to make mistakes. She recommends engaging youth in the process, providing a wide range of housing opportunities, providing financial assistance, and providing tuition waiver programs. She analyzes programs and services available to transition age youth in 7 states: CA, NY, PA, TX, IL, FL, and MA. Atkinson additionally advocates for services through age 22 or 24 to allow youth to finish 4-year college programs. She also argues for a dramatically different court structure for foster youth over 18 so as not to punish them for missing hearings if they are performing well otherwise.

CASA for Children. (missing date). Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) Transitional Planning Conferences. Retrieved July 24, 2012 at http://nc.casaforchildren.org/files/public/community/programs/ProgramResources/News_from_Network_Nov09.pdf.

This worksheet describes Transitional Planning Conferences conducted in Orange County, California. Transitional Planning Conferences are based on the Family Group Decision Making model by bringing together youth and caring adults in a transition planning process. Conferences are supposed to empower youth and provide them with the necessary skills to transition out of foster care.

Casey Family Programs. (2008). Improving Outcomes for Older Youth in Foster Care. Retrieved July 25, 2012 at http://www.casey.org/resources/publications/pdf/WhitePaper_ImprovingOutcomesOlderYouth_FR.pdf.

Casey Family Programs describes outcomes of former foster care youth and factors that predict transition success. Predictors include fewer placement changes while in care, having concrete resources (\$250 in cash, dishes and utensils, driver's license, etc.) after care, early positive engagement with employment, and staying in foster care beyond age 18. Casey Family Programs additionally provides policy recommendations such as eliminating barriers to permanency, providing ongoing services to older youth, and increasing communication between agencies about effective programs.

Child Trends Data Snapshot. (2011). *Foster Care Data Snapshot*. Retrieved July 25, 2012 at http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends_2011_05_31_DS_FosterCare.pdf.

This report was created by using the Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System and describes demographics of youth in foster care. Authors note that numbers have decreased of children in foster care nationwide from 2000-2009. However, trends differ according to individual states. The number of children in foster care in Massachusetts decreased between 10-25% from 2000 to 2009.

Commission on Youth at Risk. (2011). Charting a Better Future for Transitioning Foster Youth: Report from a National Summit on the Fostering Connections to Success Act. www.abanet.org/youthatrisk.

This report summarizes topics discussed at the National Summit on the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act. Over 100 leaders and experts attended the summit and discussed how this new legislation affects transition age youth and young adults. The report identifies 56 major recommendations for transition planning, which were developed from working groups at the summit. Three major themes were identified: acknowledging the unique needs of young adults, planning should be youth-driven, and programs should be assessed to see if they are working. Recommendations were specifically focused on housing and placement, education and employment, physical and mental health, and helping crossover youth.

Courtney, M. E. (2009). The Difficult Transition to Adulthood for Foster Youth in the U.S.: Implications for the State as Corporate Parent. *Social Policy Report: Giving Child and Youth Development Knowledge Away*, Vol. XXIII, Num. 1.

Courtney emphasizes the need for the U.S. child welfare system to continue providing services and support to older foster care youth after they age out of care. He details statistics showing that former foster youth struggle in finding stable housing, securing employment and attaining higher education. Courtney argues that former foster youth should be supported later into their twenties because research shows youth not in foster care are seeking help from their parents far later in life than in the past. With the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, Courtney says there is a great opportunity for the State to provide more services to former foster youth. He notes there are still challenges for this to happen effectively such as a lack of empirical evidence of service effectiveness and lack of communication sharing among different child welfare groups and agencies.

Courtney, M. (2005). Youth Aging Out of Foster Care. *Network on Transitions to Adulthood, Policy Brief*, Issue 19.

In this issue brief, Courtney provides a general description of outcomes of youth aging out of foster care. He notes that research indicates that most foster youth who age out did not enter the system until after age 15 or 16 and were more likely to have lived in group-homes. Courtney also notes that data-collection on transition planning often fails to account for youth who go back to their family of origin or ran away. He recommends transition planning services be available to all youth who were in foster care after age 16 years.

Courtney, M., Zinn, A., Johnson, H., & Malm, K. E. (2011). Evaluation of the Massachusetts Adolescent Outreach Program for Youths in Intensive Foster Care: Final Report. OPRE Report # 2011-14. Washington D.C.: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

In this federally funded study, Courtney et al., investigated the effects of the Adolescent Outreach Program in Massachusetts. The Outreach Program provides transition age youth with adolescent outreach workers to support them during their transition from foster care. Courtney et al., found few differences between transition age youth who participated in the program and those who did not. Those in the Outreach Program were more likely to continue their education

but the authors suggest this could be because they were also more likely to stay in care. While the youth receiving this service reported receiving more help with educational, money management, financial support, and obtaining housing, they did not fare better in employment, economic well-being, housing, delinquency, pregnancy, or self-reported preparedness for independence. An important limitation of this study was that the participants were in intensive foster care so findings may not be representative of foster youth at large.

Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Lee, J. S., & Rapp, M. (2010). *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Ages 23 and 24*.

This is a longitudinal study of youth transitioning out of foster care in the Midwest. First assessments were conducted on youth's 17th or 18th birthday, the second on their 19th birthday and , the final on their 21st birthday. Results showed that while a majority had a high school degree or GED, many fewer had a job and earned a living wage. Nearly 40% had been homeless; a higher than average number were incarcerated or had children out of wedlock. One-third reported they wished they had had more training for adulthood and that it had started at a younger age.

English, A., Stinnet A. J., Dunn-Georgiou, E., & Center for Adolescent Health & the Law (2006). *Health Care for Adolescents and Young Adults Leaving Foster Care: Policy Options for Improving Access*. Chapel Hill, NC: Center for Adolescent Health and the Law; and San Francisco, CA: Public Policy Analysis and Education Center for Middle Childhood, Adolescent and Young Adult Health.

English et al., describes the barriers to health care facing transition age youth. The authors argue that states should allow youth to remain under care until age 21 in order for these youth to continue to have health care. English et al., describe different health care programs across the country such as the State Children's Health Insurance Program for children under 19, FCIA Medicaid Expansion Option, and Ribicoff youth for children in very low family outcomes.

Eyster, L., & Oldmixon, S. (2007). *State Policies to Help Youth Transition Out of Foster Care*. NGA Center for Best Practices.

Eyster and Oldmixon describe what transition planning programs need to look like to be successful. It includes permanency planning, assisting youth with health issues, teaching youth life skills, promoting educational attainment, and connecting them to employment and career opportunities and stable housing. This issue brief appears to be summarizing *The Transition to Adulthood: How States Can Support Older Youth in Foster Care* (Golonka, S., 2010).

Frey, L. (2009). *Permanency or Aging Out? A Matter of Choice*. *CW360 Permanency or Aging Out: Adolescents in the Child Welfare System*, 8-9. Retrieved July 26, 2012 at http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ssw/cascw/attributes/PDF/publications/CW360_2009.pdf.

Frey emphasizes the importance of permanency in successful transitions from foster care. She advises caseworkers and supervisors to focus on relationships rather than placements when children are in foster care. She argues relationships are longer lasting and can offer "hope, meaning, purpose, motivation, belonging, identity, and connectedness." Frey argues that Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) and Independent Living (IL) are not permanency goals but placements. Frey further advocates that family (using an expansive

definition of family) should be a significant part of the transition planning process. This may require efforts to find family for youth. Additionally, Frey advises that transition planning be discussed and conducted by a youth-centered team. Youth should not only have a transition plan but a back-up plan, especially for three primary areas: safety, permanency, and well-being (health, education, employment, housing, personal and cultural identity, life skills). Lastly, Frey advises that transition planning should involve preparing youth for permanent family relationships by helping youth understand what happened to them in the past.

Frey, L. (2004). Merging Permanency and Independent Living: Lifelong Family Relationships and Life Skills for Older Youth. *National Resource Center for Youth Development*, 8-10.

Frey argues that agencies should be concurrently promoting permanency and independent living skills for older youth. To be successful, transition planning should be youth-centered and family focused (with an expanded definition of family). Frey identifies the most promising practices, which include identifying important adults in youth's life and including them in joint planning.

Frey, L., Greenblatt, S. B., & Brown, J. (2005). A Call to Action: An Integrated Approach to Youth Permanency and Preparation for Adulthood. Retrieved July 26, 2012 at http://www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/casey_permanency_0505.pdf.

In this article, Frey et al., describe the history and current efforts concerning permanency and transition planning for older youth in foster care. They have designated a "Call to Action" to achieve the best of "permanency" and "preparation" for all youth in foster care. The authors describe multiple guiding principles for better serving transition age youth. Guiding principles included embracing sound definitions of permanency and preparation for adulthood and making planning youth-centered and family-focused. Frey et al., additionally advice different approaches to change such as partnering with youth as the central player in the planning process, including family members and significant adults in the process, and facilitating an ongoing collaborative team planning process to address permanency. The authors additionally describe youth, family, and system factors that will indicate that positive change is happening in permanency efforts and the transition planning process.

Golonka, S. (2010). The Transition to Adulthood: How States Can Support Older Youth in Foster Care. NGA Center for Best Practices, Economic, Human Services & Workforce Division.

This article identifies five ways states can help youth transition from foster care. The five strategies include promoting educational attainment, connecting youth with employment and career training, enhancing access to safe and stable housing, helping youth access and manage health care, and helping them build stable and permanent relationships. Within the five core strategies, more specific recommendations are provided as well as descriptions of sample models already being employed.

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. (2011). Foster Care to 21: Doing It Right. Issue Brief #1. Retrieved at http://www.lawyersforchildrenamerica.org/matriarch/documents/Issue_Brief_FC_to_21.pdf.

In this issue brief, authors recommend extending foster care up to age 21. Additionally, they recommend that extended care should include developmentally appropriate services and programs, and a focus on permanency. It should also be client-directed and informed by brain development research. Furthermore, authors support programs that ensure youth and other parties involved in transition planning have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. They argue that youth should actively engage in the planning, caseworkers should work to involve and prepare youth to lead, the judicial system should provide oversight, and a youth's attorney should provide accountability checks.

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. (2011). Social Capital: Building Quality Networks for Young People in Foster Care. Issue Brief #2. Retrieved at <https://docs.google.com/gview?url=http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/sites/default/files/Issue%20Brief%2520-%2520Social%2520Cap.pdf>.

The issue brief emphasizes the importance of social capital for youth in foster care and describes how this can be experienced through family, in social locations (ex. school), in neighborhoods, in communities, and between peers. This article provides recommendations on how agencies can support youth developing and sustaining social capital in these arenas.

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. (2011). The Adolescent Brain: New Research and Its Implications for Young People Transitioning from Foster Care.

This report analyzes adolescent brain development and discusses what the new findings mean for transition planning. Recommendations include giving youth opportunities to make mistakes, connecting them with caring adults, engaging them in their own planning and decision-making, ensuring that services are trauma-informed, and extending developmentally appropriate care to age 21.

The Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. (2005). 18 and Out: Life After Foster Care in Massachusetts. Retrieved July 25, 2012 at <http://www.chapa.org/pdf/18andOut.pdf>.

This article reports data on employment, education, housing and mental health for former Massachusetts foster youth. In response to the largely negative findings, the authors recommend stressing permanency, adopting new approaches to teaching living skills, increasing data sharing among child serving agencies, and providing support and services for health insurance, education grants, and employment opportunities. The authors also describe promising programs and services that already exist in Massachusetts.

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development. (2006). Youth Focus: Engaging Young People in Permanency Planning. The University of Oklahoma OUTREACH.

In this article, the authors emphasize the importance of permanency for successful transitions and specify that permanent connections should be youth-defined. They recommend that youth should be active participants in permanency planning. The authors also include practice tips for engaging youth in permanency planning. Additionally, model programs incorporating youth in permanency planning are identified, such as Colorado's Project UPLIFT, New York's Families for

Teens, and Brooklyn's You Gotta Believe. These programs all involved supporting youth in identifying important people in their lives and then working to connect youth with these adults.

Task Force on Youth Aging Out. (2008). Preparing Our Kids for Education, Work and Life: A Report of the Task Force on Youth aging Out of DSS Care. Pdf available at www.tbf.org.

The consistent theme throughout this report is that five core resource are important to successful transitions. These are: nurturing relationships with adults; safe and stable housing; supports for mental and physical health; educational preparation; and opportunities to make a difference through public service. The authors also describe the results of a BU School of Social Work study where former foster youth indicate they had received helpful services despite ultimately negative outcomes. Youth did indicate they wanted more involvement in service planning. The task force recommended expansive policy and practice-level changes that would make programs age-appropriate, increase accountability, and follow the five core resources.

Walker, L. (2005). E Makua Ana Youth circles: A Transition Planning Process for Youth Exiting Foster Care. *VOMA Connections*, Fall(21), 5, 12-13.

Walker details the E Makua Ana Youth Circles (Circles) process used in Hawaii for transition age youth. Circles are conducted and facilitated by EPIC, a non-profit organization. Walker describes the pre-circle stage, what happens during a Youth Circle, and the follow-up after a Youth Circle. Youth are very active in in the process. Youth choose important people in their lives to participate in the Circle. After receiving input and collaborating with these participants, youth make their transition plan during a period of alone time. EPIC's goal is to start Circles when youth are 16 and to have 3 circles before youth age out of the system. Walker notes that not many have gone through the Circles but those who have completed them gave positive feedback.

Walters, D., Zanghi, M., Ansell, D., Armstrong, E., & Sutter, K. (2010). Transition Planning with Adolescents: Review of Principles and Practices Across Systems. University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service, National Resource Center for Youth Development. Retrieved July 18, 2012 from <http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/publication-db/documents/transition-planning-with-adolescents.pdf>.

Walters et al., outline and describe key elements of effective transition planning. These elements include creating permanent connections, addressing the emotional experiences of foster youth such as loss of identity, implementing a strength/needs-based assessment, fostering self-determination, allowing youth to make mistakes, providing developmentally appropriate services, creating a plan that is strengths-based and youth-driven, and planning that is facilitated by skilled professionals. Walters et al. also describe transition planning in special education, mental health, juvenile justice, and international fields to gather emerging themes of effective transition planning. Six programs are described as excelling in transition planning: Hawaii's E Makua Ana Youth Circles, Iowa's Dream Team, Oregon's Comprehensive Transition Plan, Louisiana's Youth Transition Plans, Minnesota's Youth Transition Conference and Circles of Support, and New Mexico's Adoption and Adolescent Resource Team.

Whitney-Thomas, J., & Timmons, J. (1998). Research to Practice: The Most Important Member: Facilitating the Focus Person's Participation in Person Centered Planning. *Research to Practice Series, Institute for Community Inclusion*. Paper 38. Retrieved at http://scholarworks.umb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1037&context=ici_researchtopractice

The Institute for Community Inclusion conducted research on the participation of young people in the transition planning process known as Whole Life Planning. Data was collected through 34 observations and 15 semi-structured interviews among a diverse group of four communities in Massachusetts. Data was ultimately collected on 10 students, age 18-21 years. Students were ultimately categorized as Active, Controlling, Limited, or Absent participators. Student participation in the planning process was influenced by the student's own personal conversational style (gregarious or withdrawn/low key), the size of the meeting, and the level of abstraction (ex. immediate daily relevance or future events) in the conversation. The authors recommend facilitators identify the student's personal conversational style before conducting planning meetings. Additionally, the first few meetings should concern concrete, relevant information and the facilitator should continually evaluate whether process is working for each student. For abstract planning sessions, facilitators should make concepts connect to the student's relevant starting points, make sure the student understands the abstract ideas, and ensure the student is still controlling, designing, and participating in the process.

